STATEMENT OF HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Founded in 1896 as an Episcopalian boarding school for boys, St. George's School in Middletown, Rhode Island is today one of the top private co-ed college preparatory schools in the United States, serving some 330 students.[1] This nomination includes three buildings on the St. George's campus: the school chapel formally known as the Church of St. George (1924-1928), commonly referred to as the Chapel, which is the most architecturally and historically significant building on campus; and two other attached structures: the Little Chapel (1909-1911), the original school chapel; and the Memorial Schoolhouse (1921-1923), built to honor the school's World War I dead. Situated in the heart of the campus, near the athletic fields, these three purposefully conjoined buildings illustrate the mission of St. George's: to provide its students with a well-rounded academic, physical, and religious education, intending to make them healthy in mind, body, and soul. The three buildings have different levels of integrity, but all amply meet Criteria A and C for listing on the National Register of Historic Places; the Chapel also meets Criteria B.

Under Criteria A, the Church of St. George, the Little Chapel, and the Memorial Schoolhouse reflect the rise of faith-based private education in America, particularly of Episcopal boarding schools in New England, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

Under Criteria B, the Church of St. George owes its very existence to John Nicholas Brown, Jr. (St. George's Class of 1918), and its vividly expresses his strong commitment to faith and deep love for the architecture of the Middle Ages. Scion of one of Rhode Island's oldest and most prominent families, Brown conceived his vision for the Chapel before the age of 20; at 22 he donated all of the funding, and spent most of the next decade overseeing every detail of its design and construction. For the rest of his life he remained devoted to this Chapel and continued to raise money for its maintenance and enhancement. The Chapel carries the stamp of Brown's character and personality in every stone, every stained glass window, every piece of ornament. It is his unique legacy, not just to his alma mater but to his state and his country.

Under Criteria C, the Little Chapel and the Memorial Schoolhouse both represent the "Jacobethan" style of the Tudor Revival; the Little Chapel was designed by the Providence firm of Clarke, Howe, and Homer of Providence, and the Schoolhouse by the nationally prominent New York firm of McKim Mead & White. The Church of St. George is a masterpiece of English Gothic Revival ecclesiastical architecture, representing the work of one of the major church

1 St. George's is often mistakenly described as being located in Newport, R.I.; it was indeed originally founded in Newport in 1896, but has been located in Middletown, Newport's next door neighbor, since 1901. St. George's went co-ed in 1972.

architects of his generation, Ralph Adams Cram of the Boston firm of Cram & Ferguson. The chapel also highlights the artistry of the renowned sculptor Joseph Coletti and master blacksmith Samuel A. Yellin. Along with John Nicholas Brown, Jr. their collective vision produced one of the most distinctive and beautiful religious buildings in Rhode Island, if not America.

Protestant-Affiliated Boarding Schools in the 19th Century

Until the mid-18th century, American society was culturally and religiously homogeneous, in the sense that most settlers came from England and espoused the Protestant faith. (Granted, Protestantism itself had many distinct denominations.) In Colonial New England especially, religion and civic life were intimately intertwined: typically the first public building erected in a new settlement would be a meetinghouse, built both for worship and for town meetings. (Rhode Island, founded on the principle of religious freedom, proved the exception to this rule.) Religion was also intrinsic to education: indeed, the earliest institutions of higher learning in America were founded specifically to train the clergy of various Protestant sects, and in many communities, the local minister did double duty as teacher. (The Bible was often used as a teaching tool, as reading it was considered a worthwhile activity for all citizens.) The quality of formal education varied widely, but it was taken for granted that all children, including those who attended local schools supported by the taxpayers, would be instructed in the common religious beliefs and moral values of American society. "From earliest Colonial times until well into the nineteenth century Americans commonly assumed that religion was the fundament of a complete education." [2]

Formal education was not compulsory during this period, nor expected to continue for at least a dozen years, as it is today. Childhood itself was very different in Colonial times: around the age of 12 or 13, most young people started working to support themselves and their families; and in their mid-teens, they often got married and started families of their own. Acquiring adult responsibilities at such an early age meant that very few children had the time, the resources, or even the opportunity to continue their education beyond the elementary level. The concepts of "middle school" and "high school" were virtually unknown, and a college education was only available to the sons of the gentry or the wealthy. These boys typically grew up to become "gentlemen:" men of property and affluence, the social and political leaders of their communities; some went into government or military service, the clergy, or the professions. But although young men of the upper classes had the advantage of access to higher education, they had limited opportunities to prepare themselves to attend college. They could

2 Kraushaar, p. 19.

work with a private tutor; in urban areas they could enroll in a "Latin grammar school" offering a classical and mathematics curriculum; or they could apply to the "preparatory department" (if one existed) at their chosen college. Alternatively, they could go abroad; European secondary schools (and universities) were notably superior to American ones in this period.

The dearth of secondary educational opportunities in America led to the "age of the academies," beginning in the late 18th century and lasting well into the 19th. Leaders of the academy movement such as Benjamin Franklin argued that the newborn, all-men-are-created-equal United States needed an innovative system of secondary education to prepare its young men for "a host of unprecedented opportunities for new and as yet undefined careers for which traditional schooling was irrelevant."[3] The academies offered a well-rounded general education, including the classics, mathematics, art, music, history, philosophy, literature, modern languages, and general sciences. Some also offered practical courses such as navigation and land surveying, to prepare non-college-bound students for the working world. Among the first of these new schools were Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass. (1778) and Philips Exeter Academy in Exeter, N.H. (1781/1783).[4]

In Rhode Island, three academy schools were established before 1800. The first was the University Grammar School, founded in Warren in 1764 by the Rev. James Manning and affiliated with the colony's first institution of higher learning, Rhode Island College (later Brown University). The University Grammar School's curriculum included the classics, grammar and spelling, reading, and "speaking English with propriety." [5] Both school and college relocated to Providence in 1770. In 1780 the first Quaker school, the Friends School in Portsmouth, opened its doors; and in 1781 the Kingston Academy (originally founded in Boston in 1695) was established in North Kingstown. All three of these academies predated the establishment of a statewide system of public education in Rhode Island, between 1789-1828. (Not until the latter half of the 19th century did public education in Rhode Island became free to all, and compulsory for all children aged 6 to 16.) Despite the increasing availability of public schools in the early years of the 19th century, additional private schools were founded during this period in Wickford (North Kingstown), East Greenwich, Westerly, Bristol, Warwick, Woonsocket, North Providence, and Coventry, and at least half a dozen were established in Providence alone. Furthermore, in 1828, two seminaries for women opened in Warren and in Providence. An 1832 report on state education in Rhode Island indicated that 17,034 students were enrolled in

3 Ibid., p. 60.

4 Ibid., p. 59. Note Kraushaar says Philips Exeter was founded 1781; McLachlan says 1783 (p. 9).

5 Bicknell, p. 667.

323 public schools, and another 3,403 pupils in 269 private schools.[6]

Academy schools often attracted students from distant locales, who would lodge with local families (students' ages varied widely, ranging from children as young as six to grown men in their 20s and 30s). The concept of the boarding school developed some forty years after the first academies were established. The idea that students derived specific benefits from living and learning under the same roof evolved from the educational philosophies of Joseph Greer Cogswell and George Bancroft, who established the short-lived but extremely influential Round Hill School in Northampton, Mass. in 1823. Inspired by examples in England, Germany, and Switzerland, "Round Hill marked the practical inception in the United States of … a carefully contrived learning environment combined with the isolation of the young in a unique boarding school subculture under the watchful eye of concerned tutors." [7] Round Hill lasted only twelve years, closing in 1834 due to financial difficulties, but its heyday coincided with a time of increasing industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and social and political upheaval in America that was to continue throughout the 19th century. In this era, "…belief in the benign moral and aesthetic influence of bringing up children in secluded innocence amid the beauties of unspoiled nature held a strong appeal for upper class city-dwelling parents." [8]

Many academies, whether they boarded students or not, affiliated themselves with a religious institution and stressed the teaching of piety and moral virtues in addition to academic subjects. This dovetailed with the evolution, during the early to mid 19th century, of public education into a more secular and institutionalized system. States began to require all children to attend school, and gradually standardized curriculum requirements, teacher qualifications, and the length of the school year. In response, local communities began to seek state aid to finance their public education systems, and a fierce debate about the place of religion in public schools ensued (a debate that continues even today). Inevitably, religion disappeared from public education, to the disappointment of many Americans who wanted their faith to play a prominent role in their children's education. This desire sharpened in the 1830s and 1840s as the Great Awakening (a period of resurgent, evangelical Protestantism) coincided with the first waves of what would become an enormous influx of foreign immigrants of diverse faiths. As a result, by the mid-19th century many groups began to assert their own ethnic, cultural, and religious identities. "And so the unsolvable issue of religion in the public schools became an

6 Bicknell, pp. 668-679. The category "private schools" includes those offering elementary as well as secondary instruction.

7 Kraushaar, pp. 64-65.

8 Ibid.

added incentive for Protestants, Catholics, and later, for Jews to build their own schools in which the true faith could be transmitted."[9]

Unlike other dissenting Protestant sects that had broken from the Church of England before even coming to America, the Episcopalians (who first settled in the Chesapeake Bay colonies of Maryland and Virginia) retained their ties with the mother church until well after the Revolution. Finally, in 1789, the American Episcopal Church established itself as a separate entity from the Church of England and adopted its own constitution (partly in an effort to escape its Tory image). By 1830, the Episcopal Church had become "predominantly an urban and upper-class denomination," a fact that undoubtedly influenced its forays into education. [10]

The Episcopal Church founded its first theological seminary in 1822 (the General Theological Seminary, New York City), and its first college in 1824 (Hobart College in Geneva, New York). In 1828, William Augustus Muhlenberg, himself an Episcopal clergyman, established the first Episcopalian secondary school, the Flushing Institute on Long Island, New York. Muhlenberg took the Round Hill School concept one step further: while Round Hill's mission was "the development of gentlemen and scholars," the Flushing Institute's mission was "to educate *Christian* gentlemen and scholars" (emphasis added), by providing religious instruction and emphasizing character development.[11] Muhlenberg also promoted the concept of his school as a family, consistent with the popular notion (still current today) that "family values" create social stability. The headmaster played the role of father, and his wife (or other female relative) the role of mother; the faculty and staff also provided familial guidance to young pupils. The Flushing Institute survived only sixteen years, until 1844, but together with the Round Hill School it set the bar for future college preparatory boarding schools affiliated with the Episcopal Church.

Most of the Episcopalian boarding schools established after the Civil War, specifically for the education of boys, were started by a group of Episcopal clergy and laymen, and affiliated with a diocese rather than a specific parish church. An alumnus of Round Hill, George Shattuck,

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9 Ibid, pp. 21-22. These private religious schools met with considerable resistance from those who believed that the public schools represented bedrock American ideals of democracy, patriotism, and manifest destiny; and indeed some states outlawed denominational private schools in the 1870s and 1880s. Finally in 1925, the U.S. Supreme Court confirmed the right of parents to send their children to any religious or other private school of their choice, while reaffirming the right of states to supervise all non-public schools.

10 McLachlan, p. 109.

11 Ibid., p. 106 and 113.

founded St. Paul's School in Concord, N.H. (1856); its first rector, Henry Augustus Coit, had attended the Flushing Institute. Coit served St. Paul's for 40 years and never varied from his belief that "the Christian religion, backed by home influences and the manly compulsions of physical sports, is all that is necessary for the proper training of the young."[12] Coit's influence spread well beyond St. Paul's; during his lifetime he was credited with influencing the establishment of St. Mark's School in Southborough, Mass. (1865) and the Groton School in Groton, Mass. (1884).[13] St. Mark's was founded by Joseph Burnett, a successful businessman whose son had attended St. Paul's. Groton was founded by Endicott Peabody, who had attended school at Cheltenham in England as a youth, and much admired its combination of classical curriculum, organized athletics, and Christian worship rooted in the Anglican tradition. English public schools like Cheltenham aimed to produce the ideal British gentleman, strong in mind, body, and soul, and ready to take his rightful place as a future leader of society.[14] Endicott Peabody proposed to do much the same thing at Groton: to prepare students not only for college, but also for life, by engendering qualities such as maturity, integrity, modesty, honor, self-restraint, manliness, Christian character, and leadership. Peabody's vision had particular appeal in New England, whose cultural and intellectual center of Boston was distinctly Anglophile at this time.

Meanwhile, during the last half of the 19th century, many Americans worried about the increasing immorality of society, and sought to protect their innocent young from its evil influences as long as possible. An idealized view of childhood developed, extending into the newly defined period of adolescence, and the amount of time that an American youth might be encouraged to spend in school likewise extended, to at least the age of 17 or 18. As American colleges and universities elevated their academic standards, many becoming at least the equal of the foreign universities they emulated, reformers set about improving public secondary education and making it available to as many young people as possible, whether they intended to go on to college or not. Furthermore, attending college came to be seen as necessary for success in business as it was for the professions.

Around the turn of the 20th century, both the public high school and the private boarding school showed tremendous growth. Nationwide, between 1895 and 1910 the percentage of college

12 Ibid., p. 161.

13 Ibid., pp. 156 and 179-180.

14 Then, as now, the term "public school" in England referred to an institution with exclusive admissions standards and high tuition fees.

students who came from public high schools increased dramatically, from 41% to 89%.[15] But during this same period, half of the top private boarding schools in the country were either founded or reorganized: Lawrenceville School (Lawrenceville, N.J.) in 1883; Groton School (Groton, N.H.) in 1884; Woodbury Forest School (Woodbury Forest, Va.) in 1889; Taft School (Waterbury, Conn.) in 1890; Hotchkiss School (Lakeville, Conn.) in 1892; Choate School (Wallingford, Conn.) and St. George's School (Middletown, R.I.), both in 1896; Middlesex School (Concord, Mass.) in 1901; Deerfield Academy (Deerfield, Mass.) in 1903; and Kent School (Kent, Conn.) in 1906. Together these became known as the "St. Grottlesex" schools, a cadre of about 16 elite institutions that also includes St. Paul's and Phillips Exeter in New Hampshire, St. Mark's and Phillips Andover in Massachusetts, and others in Pennsylvania and Virginia.[16] Of these, St. George's School is the only one located in Rhode Island.

One of the most common, and architecturally prominent, features of a "St. Grottlesex" campus was its chapel. The English architect Henry Vaughan, who designed the chapels at both St. Paul's and Groton Schools, introduced and popularized the English Gothic Revival style for ecclesiastical buildings on boarding school campuses.

Ecclesiastical Architecture and the Gothic Revival

The 19th century was a period of rapid population growth, of industrialization and urbanization, of military conflict, and of scientific, mechanical, and technical advancements: all of which combined to engender profound social, economic, political, and cultural changes. One of the consequences of this upheaval was a widespread and determined effort to defend, strengthen, and promote the Christian faith (in all its variations) as a means of coping with the myriad problems of the modern world. Another result was a renewed intellectual interest in ancient cultures, which were seen to represent important values such as democracy, order, faith, truth, and beauty. It was in this context that the medieval Gothic church came to be seen as the perfect expression of Christian ideals, and the style was enthusiastically resurrected for ecclesiastical buildings of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, first in England and then in America. The English Gothic Revival style of the Church of St. George at St. George's School

15 McLachlan, p. 193.

16 Ibid., pp. 10-12. McLachlan takes exception to the characterization of these schools as "elitist" in the sense of "aristocratic" or "upper class." He notes that while their students were usually the children of the rich, the schools themselves were typically run by "middle-income intellectuals, moralists, and clergymen," who "consciously educated their students to avoid, abjure, and despise most of what are traditionally thought to be aristocratic or upper class values and styles of life." In this respect the American private school was quite distinct from the English public school of the late 19th and early 20th century.

epitomizes this trend.

The medieval Gothic style had its heyday from the 12th to the 15th centuries, a period when Roman Catholicism was the dominant religion throughout Europe and Byzantium.[17] For ecclesiastical architecture – parish churches, cathedrals, abbeys, convents, and monasteries – the immediate stylistic predecessor of the Gothic was the Romanesque. The two modes actually shared many characteristics, including stone materials, cruciform plan, regular proportions, arched fenestration, many columns, one or more towers, a vaulted roof, rich ornamentation, and an underground crypt for burials and the display of holy relics.[18] However, the Romanesque church's distinctive rounded arches supported by massive walls and columns conveyed a ponderous appearance, while the Gothic church (despite its considerable size) had nothing like that sense of weight and bulk.

The transition from Romanesque to Gothic occurred not because of a change in religious doctrine or ritual, but rather because of two major refinements in the builders' arts: the pointed arch and the flying buttress, both mastered by stonemasons by the mid-12th century. Unlike the rounded arch, the pointed arch's height did not depend on its span; furthermore, the pointed arch could distribute the weight of the stone above it by concentrating loads at specific points and directing the thrust to the ground by means of flying buttresses built against the outside walls. These techniques in turn enabled the development of decorative (as opposed to purely functional) ribbed vaulting in the roof; it also relieved the need for load-bearing walls and columns, so that large expanses of windows could be introduced into walls, and interior columns could be slimmed down.

The hallmarks of the Gothic style all served a spiritual as well as a structural or artistic purpose. The pointed arch, the flying buttress, and the ribbed vaulted roof all conveyed a strong sense of verticality that drew the eye upward toward God in His heaven. Pinnacles, towers, and spires rising above the roof further reinforced that sense, and also ensured that

17 Clark, pp. 16-17: The term "Gothic" was not used in the Middle Ages; in fact, the style itself remained unnamed for centuries, being understood not so much as an architectural fashion as, simply, the correct way to build a church. The term appears to have been coined in Italy during the Renaissance as a slur against the pointed arch, which was mistakenly attributed to invention by the Goths and therefore dismissed by Palladio and other classicists as unrefined, even barbaric.

18 Norman, pp. 115-135: Of course, not every Middle Ages religious building in Western Christendom conformed to the Romanesque or Gothic styles. Some monastic orders, such as the Benedictines, the Cistercians, and the Franciscans, built very simple functional structures, reflecting their renunciation of worldly wealth and their focus on the early, basic principles of the faith.

the church building visually dominated its surroundings, much as the Catholic Church dominated the lives of the people. The walls seemed almost ethereal, with their large expanses of glass supported by delicate stone tracery, while the roof supported by slender columns appeared to float over the nave, conveying a sense of weightlessness that spoke to the Christian promise of forgiveness and salvation. Large windows brought light, also a symbol of God, into the interior; wrought in colored glass that told stories of both the Old and New Testaments, and of the miracles and martyrdom of the saints, these windows evoked "a sense of a jeweled casket to house the treasures of spirituality …"[19] Plentiful stone sculptures and carvings held images of Jesus, the Holy Family, the apostles, other Biblical characters, the saints, and angels, as well as common folk, animals, and plants. ("As plants grow upwards toward the light, so the perfect decorative device of a Gothic building, with its upward thrust, is foliage."[20]). Intricate decorative ribbing in the vaulted roof might be patterned after a star, a flower, or a fan; carved stone bosses at the intersection of two or more ribs reminded the faithful that God watched over them from above.

The Gothic style expressed religious exultation and transcendence, and by the end of the 12th century had become *de rigeur* for religious buildings all over Europe. The English soon developed their own version of the style, which evolved in three distinct phases: the "lancet" or "Early English" (late 12th century), the "Decorated" (mid 13th - early 14th centuries), and the very ornate "Perpendicular" (mid 14th - early 16th centuries), which innovated the beautiful, delicate fan vaulting seen, for example, at King's College Chapel at Cambridge University. Neither the Renaissance nor the Protestant Reformation managed to completely eradicate the Gothic style in England, especially outside of London. Although the various Protestant sects renounced all forms of ecclesiastical ornament in their crusade to cleanse the institutional Catholic Church of idolatry, excess, and corruption, medieval structural design and construction techniques remained the traditional way of church building well into the 17th century. The basic Gothic forms were thus adapted, in much simplified guise, for new Protestant churches.

One of the earliest and most influential advocates of reviving the full-blown Gothic style for religious buildings was the architect Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-1852). A devout Catholic, Pugin was among those who saw the Middle Ages as "the Age of Faith," when Christianity was pure and strong (before being undermined by the succeeding Ages of Humanism, Reason, and Industry). Pugin published several books in the 1830s and 1840s

19 Ibid., p. 154.

20 Ibid, p. 162.

contending "that Gothic was not a mere style but the very embodiment of religious truth."[21] He also insisted "that every feature of a building should be essential to its construction, and that every element of construction should be frankly shown," and he introduced the concept that artistic value equals moral worth, a notion later taken up by the Pre-Raphaelites.[22]

Meanwhile, some leaders of the Church of England in the 1830s worried that the Protestant liturgy, having long suppressed any suggestion of symbolism, emotion, or ritual as too "papist," had become dour, grim, and uninspiring. A group at Oxford University called the Tractarians began advocating a return to old forms of worship from the early 17th century, before the Puritans came to prominence. The traditional Gothic church's spatial arrangements and use of symbolism in its architectural elements were seen as appropriate to these old rituals.

Pugin and the Tractarians found common cause with the new science of ecclesiology, which was first advanced by the Camden Society, founded in 1839 by two students at Cambridge University with a mission to define and promote the relationship between theological meaning, liturgical practice, and actual church structure and ornamentation.[23] The Camden Society insisted upon strictly authentic interpretations of medieval Gothic architectural principles and religious symbolism in ornamentation.

All of this had a huge influence on succeeding generations of church architects: "In England, something like half the existing churches were built in the 19th century, and a very high proportion of these were Gothic." [24] The cause was also taken up by the Pre-Raphaelites of the late 19th century. Proponents like John Ruskin, Dante Gabriel Rosetti, and William Morris sought inspiration in the hand-crafted, "pure" art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in reaction against the machine-made, mass-produced, "soullessness" of the industrial age; and they too equated aesthetic excellence with moral goodness.

The vogue for the English Gothic Revival style for ecclesiastical buildings in America, particularly on boarding school campuses, arrived with the British architect Henry Vaughan,

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21 Ibid., p. 174. Pugin's books included *Contrasts: or, A Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages and the Corresponding Buildings of the Present Day* (1836), *True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1841), and *Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture* (1843). See also Clark, pp. 171-172.

22 Clark, p. 200-201.

23 Norman, p. 268.

24 Ibid, p. 267.

who immigrated to Boston in 1882. (Some American architects, such as Richard Upjohn, had indeed produced Gothic Revival churches in the mid-19th century, but these had limited influence and were soon displaced by later styles of the Victorian era, most prominently Richardsonian Romanesque.) Vaughan was steeped in the Gothic tradition, having worked closely with its premier British practitioner, G.F. Bodley (the two would later collaborate on the design of Washington D.C.'s National Cathedral). Vaughan's design for St. Paul's School Chapel in Concord, N.H. (1886-1894) earned him other commissions for Episcopal churches at prestigious private schools, notably Groton. Significantly, Henry Vaughan was both neighbor and mentor to Ralph Adams Cram, who met him in the mid-1880s while a young architectural apprentice in Boston. Forty years later, Cram co-designed the Church of St. George at St. George's School in Rhode Island, a quintessential English Gothic Revival church.

St. George's School

When St. George's School was founded, Rhode Island did not yet have a system of state-supported public high schools. Not until 1898 did the State begin to provide financial support for high schools, and not until 1909 was every city and town required to maintain a public high school or to provide that level of education elsewhere at town expense.[25] Meanwhile, by the turn of the 20th century Rhode Island had lost a significant percentage of its private secondary schools: a 1902 statewide survey found only 28 private schools at all grade levels, 20 of them in Providence, 4 in Newport, and 4 in other communities.[26] St. George's clearly filled a need, especially for well-to-do college-bound young men from Protestant families.

On April 24, 1896, a small advertisement appeared in the *Newport Daily News*: "Mr. John B. Diman will open a small boarding school for boys in Newport, in September 1896. For information, address 300 Angell Street, Providence, R.I." [27] Four months was not much time to equip, staff, and enroll students in a brand new college preparatory boarding school for grades 7 through 12 (Forms I through VI). But despite some initial difficulties, "Mr. Diman's School for Boys" opened only one month behind schedule, on October 1, 1896, with a dozen students, in rented quarters on what is now Hunter Avenue in Newport. The rigorous curriculum included Latin, Greek, literature, history, sciences, mathematics, geology, music, and French, all taught by two full-time teachers (Headmaster Diman himself taught the classics

25 Bicknell, p. 690.

26 Field, pp. 384-385.

27 Taverner, p. 1.

and English) and two part-time teachers.

John Byron Diman (1863-1949) had an extensive academic background (B.A. from Brown University; M.Div. from the Cambridge (Mass.) Theological School; and M.A. from Harvard University) and three years of teaching experience when he founded St. George's School. He was also a Deacon in the Episcopal Church, and in 1888 he had been assigned to the Berkeley Memorial Chapel, later known as St. Columba's Episcopal Church, on Vaucluse Avenue in Middletown. This experience influenced Diman's choice of Newport, and later Middletown, as the site of his new school.[28] Diman's association with St. Columba's Church continued long after he founded St. George's School, and students attended worship services there for over 30 years.

Within a short time, Mr. Diman's School for Boys changed its name to St. George's School. [29] Initially owned solely by Diman, St. George's School faced considerable financial challenges in the early years, and in 1900 Diman obtained a formal charter from the State of Rhode Island that established the school as a corporation offering common stock to investors. The first president of the Board of Trustees was the Right Reverend William N. McVickar, Bishop of the

28 Ibid., pp. 7-8: at the time St. George's was founded, Newport had another college preparatory boarding school, Cloyne House, established in 1895 and also affiliated with the Episcopal Church. Cloyne House closed in 1917.

29 Taverner's book does not explain when (or why) the name changed, but it seems to have happened sometime before 1899, when the school's literary magazine was first published (p. 14): its name, *The Dragon*, is a clear reference to the legend of St. George. Born in Palestine at the end of the third century, the son of a Christian who was also an important local official in the government of the Roman Empire, George grew up to become an officer in the Roman army. Legend has it that one day he came upon a city (now Beirut, Lebanon) being menaced by a monstrous dragon; the king had offered up his daughter as a sacrifice, but George rescued the princess and killed the dragon in return for the king and all the citizens converting to Christianity. When the Roman Emperor Diocletian began persecuting Christians, George resigned his army commission in protest. Imprisoned and tortured for his faith, George miraculously remained unharmed and performed numerous other miracles during his seven-year incarceration. Eventually he was beheaded, and for his martyrdom he was beatified as a saint. Over time his cult spread across all of Christendom, from the Middle East to the British Isles. During the Crusades of the late 11th century, England's King Richard I (the Lion-Hearted) placed himself and his men under St. George's protection, and upon his safe and victorious return home, Richard made St. George the patron saint of England. He is also the patron saint of the Order of the Garter (founded by England's King Edward III in 1347); the Italian cavalry; the cities of Beirut , Istanbul, Moscow, Genoa, and Venice; and the Spanish provinces of Aragon and Catalan. Many of these places celebrate his saint's day, April 23. In art, St. George is usually shown as a youth in armor, often mounted on a horse, either in the act of killing a dragon or with a slain dragon at his feet. His shield and lance pennant show a red cross on a white ground. At St. George's School, the literary magazine is called *The Dragon*; the newspaper, *The Red and White*; and the yearbook, *The Lance*. Numerous images of dragons and of St. George himself also abound all over campus, and the red cross/white ground is featured in the school coat of arms.

Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island. Diman himself was the largest stockholder and retained control of the school's day-to-day operations.

For the years 1897-1901, St. George's leased Swann Villa on Seaview Avenue near First Beach in Newport. From the east veranda of Swann Villa, Diman could look out across First Beach Bay to a spacious and commanding hilltop site in Middletown, about two miles away, overlooking Easton's Point and Second (Sachuest) Beach. Diman found the rural, naturalistic qualities and extensive ocean views of this site to be ideal for a boarding school and, ambitious to grow St. George's, he convinced his Board of Trustees to assume the financial risk of constructing a new campus. In 1901 St. George's School relocated to its present, gorgeous setting on "The Hilltop." The first building constructed was a Georgian Revival-style manor house designed by Diman's cousin, Prescott O. Clarke, of the Providence architectural firm Clarke, Spaulding and Howe. "Its exterior offered the presence found at St. George's older sister schools, St. Paul's, St. Mark's, and Groton. Its interior was, for the most part, much more Spartan. Specifically designed to house a boarding school community, it was crammed with classrooms, dormitories, the dining room and kitchen, offices and servants' rooms." [30] This building was immediately dubbed "Old School."

30 Taverner, p. 21.

As he recruited more faculty, Diman retreated from teaching to focus on his administrative duties (although he continued to offer a course in Sacred Studies). The Headmaster's sister, Emily Diman (1873-1949), came to live on campus in 1904, and for the next 24 years she acted as a surrogate wife to her bachelor brother, and as surrogate mother to the student body, especially the younger boys. ("Admired by all," Emily Diman is the only woman memorialized in the school chapel, in recognition of her many contributions to St. George's.[31]) St. George's School attracted considerable loyalty and support from its earliest alumni, many of whom enrolled their own sons at St. George's and encouraged friends and acquaintances to do the same. While the student body initially came mostly from well-to-do New England families, it was not long before boys from up and down the Eastern Seaboard, the Midwest, and even overseas, sought admission. By 1906 the school had 88 students, all but two of them boarders. The first decade of the 20th century passed in a flurry of new construction on campus: classroom buildings, dormitories and faculty residences, a dining hall, a gymnasium, a boathouse, fire safety buildings, and a power plant.[32]

In 1907, St. George's was re-chartered as a private non-profit educational institution formally affiliated with the Episcopal Church, and "there was a sense of the School's finally having arrived in league with Groton, St. Paul's, St. Mark's, and other better known Episcopal Schools." [33] But the campus still lacked a chapel of its own. Headmaster Diman certainly intended to build a chapel, but funding was scarce enough for the other buildings necessary to a proper school. Nonetheless, attendance at Sunday worship services was expected, so every week the students and many of the resident faculty walked five miles to and from the nearest Episcopal church, St. Columba's in Middletown (coincidentally, Diman's former pastorate). In very bad weather, worship services were held in the school gymnasium.

The Little Chapel (1909-1911)

Finally, in 1909, Headmaster Diman donated some funds out of his own pocket to construct a school chapel. He commissioned architects Clarke, Howe, and Homer of Providence (again utilizing the talents of his cousin, Prescott O. Clarke) to design a small brick building sited just

31 Ibid., pp. 25-26 and 72. Note that since the arrival of Headmaster J. Vaughan Merrick in 1928, all St. George's headmasters have been married men; their wives unquestionably also made many contributions to the life of the school over the years.

32 Several of these early buildings still survive and merit study for their eligibility for National Register listing, including Old School (1901); Sixth Form House (1903); Arden Hall (1907); and King Hall (1907).

33 Taverner, p. 44.

north of the cloister that connected Old School with King Hall.[34]

Prescott O. Clarke (1858-1935) was born in Providence and educated at Brown University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He began his architectural practice in 1895 and was principal in a succession of firms, all based in Providence: Clarke & Spaulding (1895-1901), Clarke, Spaulding & Howe (1901-1903), Clarke & Howe (1903-1910), Clarke, Howe & Homer (1910-1913), and Clarke & Homer (1913-1928). Clarke's latter partners were Wallis Eastburn Howe (1868-1960) and Eleazer B. Homer (1864-1929), both M.I.T. alumni like Clarke. Much of these firms' work was done in Providence, including the U.S. Post Office, Court House and Custom House (1903-1907); Marvel Gymnasium at Brown University (1930); and the New England Telephone Exchange Building (1910), all of which are listed on the National Register. They also designed five buildings at St. George's School (1901-1924). [35]

As construction on the Little Chapel proceeded, the project began to run short of money. Headmaster Diman solicited additional financial assistance from Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Newbold of Philadelphia, whose sons Arthur and Eugene were members of the Classes of 1905 and 1911, respectively. The Newbolds' gift of $2,000 (a very generous sum in 1910) allowed the Little Chapel to be expanded and completed. The June 1910 issue of the school magazine, *The Dragon*, reported: "The chapel is about the size of the chancel at St. Columba's, and will accommodate a congregation of forty. The walls are of brick, built on simple and dignified lines. The interior specifications give the effect of height which is so important in a place of worship. The roof is of open timber work, and the east end is wainscotted to a considerable height." [36] The Little Chapel is quite modest both in size and in design; its leaded glass casement windows and exposed timber roof beams and trusses that "give the effect of height" evoke the Jacobethan style of Tudor Revival, while its large pointed arch entryway (modified in 1924-1928) evokes the Gothic Revival spirit of the adjacent Church of St. George.

The Little Chapel hosted its first worship service in March 1910, and was finally completed in 1911. While it could not, and was never intended to be able to, accommodate the entire St. George's community, the Little Chapel did provide an on-campus location for morning communion services, for confirmation classes and services, for Bible study classes, and for form meetings. Several donors offered gifts to the new chapel, such as altar cloths, altar

34 Doll, "The Little Chapel of St. George's School," p. 8.

35 Withey, pp. 123-124; also Jordy, pp. 216-217.

36 Doll, "The Little Chapel of St. George's School, p. 3.

books, and a fine chalice designed by Frank E. Cleveland of Cram and Ferguson. (As noted above, Ralph Adams Cram later collaborated on the design of the Church of St. George.) In addition, thirty-one bronze memorial plaques to deceased students, faculty, staff, and parents graced the interior walls; sixteen of these individuals died in World War I and are also commemorated in the Memorial Schoolhouse, which was built in 1921-1923 as a monument to them.

When the design for a new, much larger and grander school chapel was unveiled in 1922, the Little Chapel stood on part of the new building's proposed footprint. To make way for the new construction, the Little Chapel was raised up from its foundation, placed on rollers, and moved four times over a period of six months, finally coming to rest at the southeast corner of the new chapel: "…the normal position that would be occupied by the Lady Chapel in any Gothic cathedral."[37] (This new location, specifically chosen by Ralph Adams Cram and John Nicholas Brown, Jr., design collaborators for the new chapel, was less than 100 feet from its original site.) The Little Chapel was placed on a new concrete foundation, and a door on its north side was bricked in so as to leave only one entrance to the building, from the west side. New sculptures were installed to either side of the west doorway, illustrating The Annunciation with the Angel Gabriel on the left and the pregnant Virgin Mary on the right; the artist, Joseph Coletti, also created many sculptures for the new church building. Inside, new wood flooring was laid, and new electrical wiring, lighting, and heating systems installed.

Until the new church building was completed in September 1927, weekly communion services were held at the Little Chapel every Sunday morning. On St. George's Day 1928, the Episcopal Bishop of Rhode Island formally consecrated both the new Church of St. George and the relocated Little Chapel.

A few years after the Little Chapel was completed, the long tenure of Headmaster John B. Diman came to an end: he resigned his post in 1916.[38] Diman's replacement was Stephen P. Cabot, who had come to St. George's in 1901 to teach French and German; Cabot was

37 Ibid., p. 11.

38 Ibid., pp. 60-65: after leaving St. George's, John B. Diman converted to the Roman Catholic faith, and in 1921 was ordained as a Catholic priest, changing his name to Father Hugh Diman. He joined the Benedictine order in 1924, and in 1926 he founded a new school affiliated with the Catholic Church: the Portsmouth Priory (later Abbey) in Portsmouth, R.I. (Portsmouth is immediately north of Middletown.) His religious conversion caused considerable controversy at St. George's, but a decade later, in 1925, a new school building (Diman Hall) was erected in his name, and after Diman's death in 1949 he was memorialized with a large plaque in the school chapel.

installed as Acting Headmaster on January 1, 1917. [39]

Memorial Schoolhouse (1921-1923)

World War I inspired many Americans to heights of patriotic fervor, and St. George's School was no different. The school formed a Battalion of Infantry shortly after hostilities began in Europe in the summer of 1914 (three years before the United States entered the war), and students regularly took part in military exercises, both during the school year and at a summer training camp. Students also rolled bandages for the Red Cross, grew vegetables on the school's lawns, and donated their allowances to the war effort. By the time the war ended, "287 men connected with St. George's (80% of the Alumni) were in some form of war service."[40] Sixteen St. George's men died in the Great War, fifteen alumni (some still in their teens) and one faculty member.

In 1918, shortly after the war ended, St. George's School proposed to build a much-needed new classroom building as a memorial to its war dead. Raising the necessary in funding proved more time-consuming than originally hoped (despite a very generous donation of $109,000 from Vincent Astor, Class of 1910), and this difficulty hampered both the start and the completion of the project. The cornerstone was laid in June 1921, and the Memorial Schoolhouse was finally completed and dedicated on January 13, 1923, at a cost of $290,000.

The architects of the Memorial Schoolhouse were McKim, Mead & White, a nationally prominent New York firm headed by Charles F. McKim (1847-1909), William R. Mead (1846-1928), and Stanford White (1853-1906). McKim studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and trained with H.H. Richardson; Mead graduated from Amherst College, trained with Russell Sturgis, and studied at the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Florence; White attended New York University and also studied with Richardson. (White and McKim worked on the design for Richardson's Trinity Church in Boston.) McKim and Mead formed a partnership in 1872, and were joined by White in 1879. During a long and illustrious career, the firm of McKim, Mead & White completed more than 800 commissions. Among their masterworks are the Boston Public Library (1887-1895), the Church of the Ascension in New York City (1886-1887), and

39 Taverner notes that St. George's Board of Trustees, which was led by the Episcopal Bishop of Rhode Island until 1972, continuously debated the merits of whether St. George's should become a true "church-centered" school headed by a priest, or remain an independent church-affiliated school headed by a layman. The 6th Headmaster, William A. Buell, appointed in 1951, was the first who was also a priest (ordained in 1952) but St. George's did not become more church-centered as a result. (See pp. 112, 120, 136.)

40 Taverner, pp. 53-54.

the Agriculture Building and New York State Building for the 1892 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition. They did at least 40 projects in Rhode Island, including some of the most important buildings in the state: the Newport Casino (1881), the Narraganset Pier Casino (1883-1886), and the State Capitol (1896-1904). [41]

Like the Little Chapel, the Memorial Schoolhouse is designed in the Jacobethan mode of the Tudor Revival style. Inside the entrance hall, over a stone fireplace in the east wall, are sixteen carved oak panels designed by Frederick Rhinelander King (Class of 1904) and inscribed with the names of the dead, and a brief elegaic verse by Leonard Bacon (Class of 1905). The entrance hall now also commemorates those St. George's men who died in other military conflicts. On the west wall is mounted an Italian marble plaque inscribed with the names of twenty-nine World War II dead, along with a poignant two-line verse; also designed by Frederic Rhinelander King, this memorial was installed in 1949. Two St. George's alumni died in Korea, and four in Vietnam; stone plaques inscribed with their names are on the north wall of the foyer.

The garden at the west end of the Memorial Schoolhouse, a green space with paved pathways and several trees surrounded by a low stone wall, was added in 1983 as a memorial to St. George's fifth Headmaster, Dr. Willet L. Eccles. Eccles served from 1943-1950, a period when enrollment declined and the school faced continuous financial difficulties. Among his achievements was to facilitate the admission of students from low/moderate income families, making the St. George's population more economically and culturally diverse than it had been in the past. (This diversity had been a goal of previous headmasters, going all the way back to Diman, but never achieved to the extent that Eccles produced.) An alumnus from the "Eccles Years," William Bayne (Class of 1948) donated the funds for a garden west of Memorial Schoolhouse "in appreciation of the Headmaster who had given him, and others, the chance they might otherwise not have had to attend St. George's School." [42]

41 Withey, pp. 409-412 and 652-653; also Jordy, pp. 111-118 and 224-225.

42 Taverner, p. 117.

Church of St. George (1924-1928)

On Prize Day (at the end of the school year) in 1922, Headmaster Stephen P. Cabot announced that an anonymous donor wished to give St. George's School a new chapel. Resounding approval greeted this news, from the boys who would no longer have to walk the five mile round trip every Sunday to St. Columba's Church, and from all those who had long wanted a chapel on campus that could accommodate the entire school community. (In 1922, St. George's had 171 students, plus faculty and staff, many of whom lived on campus with their families.[43]) At the express wish of the donor, the new chapel was to abut the Memorial Schoolhouse, so that it would be well integrated amongst the school buildings, rather than stand alone in some isolated part of the campus. As the intellectual and spiritual life of the school were intimately connected, so too the new chapel was to be literally connected to a classroom building (and to other new construction envisioned for the future).

In December 1922 the school's *Alumni Bulletin* published an illustrated essay about its design written by Ralph Adams Cram. While many details changed during the course of planning and construction, Cram's essay still provides an accurate overall description of the church. An excerpt:

> "The style of the building is, generally speaking, what is known as English Perpendicular, but of a rather early type and approaching that of the antecedent epoch, which is known as Decorated. The mass of the building is simple, the richness of ornament, so far as the exterior is concerned, being confined to the belfry stages of the central tower, the north transept fronting on the athletic field, and the north bay. That portion of the cloister now to be constructed is a pretty close replica of the famous cloister at Gloucester, one of the masterpieces of 15th century architecture. It will be covered by rich fan-vaulting and each will have traceried windows opening out into the cloister garth. It is not intended that this rich type of cloister should be continued all around the central area, but rather that it should form a special, and in a sense separated, space, of the utmost beauty and dignity, where memorials may be placed from time to time recording the lives and deeds of masters and pupils.
>
> "In the interior also the richness of ornament is to be concentrated around the High Altar and the shrine in the Ante-Chapel, although the woodwork of the screens and stalls will contain much carved ornament and probably many little

43 Ibid., p. 82.

> statues of significance and teaching value. Probably a good deal of color and gold will be used in the interior decorations … "[44]

The mystery donor turned out to be John Nicholas Brown, Jr. (1900-1979), St. George's Class of 1918. The only son of John Nicholas Brown and Natalie Bayard Dresser Brown of Providence, he had been born into one of Rhode Island's wealthiest and most prominent families, which had a long tradition of educational philanthropy.[45] When John Nicholas Jr. was just three months old, his father and his uncle Harold Brown both died unexpectedly, leaving their extensive estates in trust to the infant heir. Soon afterwards, Natalie Brown commissioned Boston architect Ralph Adams Cram to design two buildings in Newport: the first, Emmanuel Church, was to be a memorial to her late husband; and the second was to be a new home for herself and her son, called Harbor Court. Cram, who had been a friend of both the senior John Nicholas Brown and Harold Brown, became a frequent visitor to Harbor Court, a close confidante of Natalie Brown, and a father figure to her young son.[46]

John Nicholas Brown, Jr. enrolled at St. George's School in the First Form (seventh grade) in 1912. He graduated in 1918 and went on to Harvard University, where he created his own major in medieval studies. (Brown met the sculptor Joseph Coletti at Harvard; the two were classmates, and both studied with several renowned medievalists, including A. Kingsley Porter and Pierre de Chagnon LaRose, who would later contribute to the design of some decorative elements in the Church of St. George. In earning both bachelor's and master's degrees, Brown developed an extraordinary knowledge of, and lifelong passion for, the great Gothic churches and Christian iconography of the Middle Ages. (He later founded the Medieval Academy of America, which continues to publish the influential journal *Speculum*.) Brown also had a deep religious faith, even as a young man, and adhered to the "Oxford Movement" of the Episcopal Church, which attempted to return church ritual closer to its pre-Puritan roots. These

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44 Cram, "The New Chapel," in *Alumni Bulletin*, December 1922, pp. 4, 6, and 7-12.

45 John Nicholas Brown, Jr. was a 9th generation descendant of one of the original settlers of Providence, Chad Brown, who arrived in 1637. His three-times-great-grandfather and uncle, Nicholas and John Brown, facilitated the location of what is now Brown University in Providence in 1770; the institution was named for Nicholas Brown's son, also Nicholas, in 1806. In 1819, another three-times-great uncle, Moses Brown, established the Quaker college preparatory school in Providence that bears his name. In the late 19th century, Nicholas II's son John Carter Brown established the Brown University library that bears his name.

46 Doll, *Heart of the Hilltop*, introduction by John Carter Brown (son of John Nicholas Brown, Jr.), p. ix. Harbor Court, located on Newport's Halidon Avenue overlooking Narragansett Bay, remained in the Brown family until 1987; it is now owned by the New York Yacht Club.

two interests converged during Brown's sophomore year at Harvard, when he began to talk with Ralph Adams Cram about designing a Gothic chapel for St. George's School. (Cram shared Brown's religious faith, which undoubtedly enhanced their collaboration.) Two years later, just after graduating from Harvard, he offered to donate all of the funding for a new chapel at St. George's. He was 22 years old.

Writing in the *Alumni Bulletin* of June 1922, the President of the Board of Trustees (also Episcopal Bishop of Rhode Island), Rev. James deWolf Perry noted: "The unnamed donor is offering more than a substantial and beautiful addition to the fabric of St. George's. He is making a dream come true, giving outward and visible form to his vision of the School, crowned and dominated by the Chapel tower which will bear witness to the world of spiritual purpose for which the school shall stand." Brown himself later wrote that the new chapel should embody "the true spirit of the religious life of the school and would thus impart to the boys the real meaning of the Church." [47]

It was not long before Brown's identity as the donor became known, and both he and Cram wrote articles for the school's *Alumni Bulletin* explaining their vision for the new chapel. Artist's renderings of the building and photographs of a wooden architectural model were also published. Finally on St. George's Day (April 23) in 1924, a groundbreaking ceremony was held, with all the students standing in formation outlining of the chapel's footprint. A few months later, the cornerstone was laid, inscribed in both Latin and English: "This Stone has been placed in The Corner of The Church of St. George on the thirteenth Day of the Month of June in the Twenty-Eighth Year of the School of Saint George and in the year of our Lord nineteen-hundred and twenty-four." (All capital letters verbatim.) Thus the new chapel was officially named the Church of St. George. The cornerstone can be found at the west end of the cloister, just outside the Donor's Door.

John Nicholas Brown, Jr. was not himself a trained architect, but he certainly deserves equal credit with Ralph Adams Cram for both the creative vision and the execution of the new chapel. Cram himself later wrote in his autobiography, "John was in actuality a vital element in the architectural operations. He joined with my associates and myself in studying and determining the design in all its details, working out the symbolism, criticizing and passing on the decorative elements, even designing portions of the pavement, particularly the Maze in the ante-chapel." Far from viewing such continuous input from the donor as interference, Cram welcomed the close collaboration, acknowledging that Brown's "interest and enthusiasm were both inspiring and directive … [he was] one of the greatest educational influences in my life..."

47 Ibid., pp. 8 and 10.

[48] Brown was indeed intimately involved in every aspect of the project, from initial design concept to the smallest construction details. He made countless design suggestions, particularly for the iconographic elements. He insisted on the highest quality materials, furnishings, fixtures, and workmanship. He vetted the qualifications of the contractors and artisans, and he visited the campus regularly to review work samples and to evaluate the overall progress of the construction. Surviving correspondence between the two men confirms that when Brown and Cram differed on a design issue, Brown usually prevailed.[49]

Cram & Ferguson, in the persons of Cram himself and architect Chester Brown, supervised the construction (as did Brown). The general contractor was L.D. Wilcutt & Sons of Boston. The major subcontractors were Buerkel & Co. of Boston (heating and ventilation); Lincoln & Tilly of Newport (plumbing); and Scanneven & Potter of Newport (electrical wiring). Among a host of highly skilled artists and artisans contributing to the project were sculptor Joseph Coletti of Boston, stone carvers from the Easton Studios of Bedford, Indiana, and blacksmith Samuel Yellin of Philadelphia. During the three years of construction, the St. George's community avidly followed its progress in the various school publications, most frequently in *The Red and White* newspaper, but also occasionally in the literary magazine, *The Dragon*. *The Lance*, the school yearbook, also published photographs of the construction between 1924-1928.

Headmaster Stephen P. Cabot resigned his position in 1926, while the chapel was under construction. Cabot's replacement was Russell H. Nevins, a member of the faculty; he served as Acting Headmaster for two years. Portrait heads of both Cabot and Nevins grace the turret tower of the chapel, as do likenesses of John Nicholas Brown, Jr., Ralph Adams Cram, Chester Brown, and the Rev. Dr. Arthur Peaslee, master of literature (one of Brown's former teachers).

48 Cram, *My Life in Architecture*, p. 244.

49 Doll, *Heart of the Hilltop*, p. 11.

On September 28, 1927, the Church of St. George hosted its first worship service, although it was not yet completed insofar as its interior decoration was concerned. A few weeks later, the *Providence Journal* newspaper praised the new chapel as "…one more in that series of architectural landmarks which from the time of perhaps the Vikings have characterized the City-by-the-Sea [Newport]. … [it] dominates the landscape for miles around and is a striking object from points as far separated as Jamestown and Sakonnet. … The wealth of detail and ornament lavished upon every portion of this building is amazing. … the impression it creates is lasting and profound." [50]

The new chapel was formally consecrated on St. George's Day 1928 (still not completely finished on the interior); John Nicholas Brown Jr. planned the elaborate ceremonies, which were presided over by the Episcopal Bishop of Rhode Island (also President of the Board of Trustees), James DeWolf Perry, Jr. A student writer describing the "long and magnificent service" in the June 1928 issue of *The Dragon* commented: "It seems but fitting that such a service should consecrate forever the crystalization of John Brown's vision. May our Chapel inspire others who shall come to this hill top long after we, who saw his dream realized, have passed away and are forgotten." [51] The day before the consecration, the *Providence Journal* again published an effusive article, this time occupying almost an entire page and including several large photographs, headlined "Gem of Church Architecture Adorns St. George's Campus … One of America's Unique and Finest Buildings:"

> "Many experts believe the gem of ecclesiastical architecture in Rhode Island to be the new chapel at St. George's School in Middletown…a small but flawlessly perfect jewel of the designer's and builder's art…in it are strangely, effectively, and strikingly combined the sacred and the temporal; exemplifying the best of ancient and modern church construction and ornamentation. … There are many larger structures. It is merely a chapel. It would be insignificant in size beside the cathedrals of Europe or even America. But in the perfection of its beauty, the striking, purposeful effectiveness of its every feature, it is considered by many to be unrivaled on any continent."[52]

50 *Providence Journal*, October 12, 1927, p. 15.

51 Taverner, p. 85.

52 *Providence Sunday Journal*, April 27, 1928, p. F3.

The new chapel "…was meant to be a bold statement of St. George's full fledged maturity in the Episcopal School league. …. during the Summer of 1928 some 2,500 people came to view the edifice, further communicating its fame beyond the Hilltop." [53] In 1929 *The Architectural Forum*, a professional journal with a national circulation, published a copiously illustrated 30-page article on the Chapel, calling it "…not only an important addition to the distinguished achievements of Cram & Ferguson, but is, further, a monument to a perfect accord and unity in ideals and the working out of every detail as between the architects and …the donor of the chapel."[54]

John Nicholas Brown, Jr. hoped that other donors would come forward to add to the new chapel's magnificence, and he provided opportunities for that to happen: all the original chapel windows were plain glass, for example, intended to be replaced over time with stained glass befitting a Gothic church. But with the crash of the stock market in October 1929, further improvements to the new chapel came slowly. The first stained glass window was not installed until 1938: the "Chivalry Window" in the north wall of the Ante-Chapel. A new pipe organ was installed in 1940, and replaced again in 1966 (both as memorials). Other stained glass windows and additional decorative items came in over time. Meanwhile, after the U.S. entered World War II in December 1941, the chapel's tower became a station for spotting and monitoring aircraft flying overhead, and ships in nearby waters. Installed in the open air at the top of the tower, this Spotter Station was staffed entirely by volunteers from the ranks of students, faculty and their wives, and local residents. It operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week until October 1943, and thereafter on a part time basis until near the end of the war. No enemy sightings were recorded (although apparently at least one German submarine spotted the distinctive chapel tower through its periscope). [55]

John Nicholas Brown Jr. lent his support to St. George's in other ways besides donating the chapel. In 1935, Brown was among those who donated funds toward the school's acquisition of 280 acres of land at Sachuest Point, just below "The Hilltop;" this purchase, made in response to a proposed amusement park at nearby Second Beach, permanently protected views from campus to the south and east. Brown also served on the Board of Trustees from 1939-1971, and then as an honorary board member until his death in 1979.

53 Taverner, p. 86.

54 Price, pp. 661-662.

55 Taverner, p. 99.

In August 1972, *Town and Country* magazine observed that St George's School "resembles an English estate with its own magnificent chapel," a comment echoed by many who have visited "The Hilltop." [56]

Ralph Adams Cram, Architect

When John Nicholas Brown, Jr. formally asked Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1924) to design the new chapel at St. George's School, he was not simply trading on a long friendship. By the 1920s, Cram had established himself as one of America's leading designers of Gothic Revival style ecclesiastical buildings, most notably of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City (1907-1930, to which sculptor Joseph Coletti also contributed works). [57]

Cram and Brown shared strong convictions in their architectural philosophy and their religious faith. In his 1917 book, *The Substance of Gothic*, Cram wrote: "Mediaevalism is the study of a lifetime, for it is that great cycle of five centuries wherein Christianity created for itself a world as nearly as possible made in its own image, a world that in spite of the wars and desecrations, the ignorance and the barbarism and the 'restorations' of modernism has left us monuments and records and traditions of a power and a beauty and nobility without parallel in history." [58] To Cram, the English Perpendicular Gothic style of the 14th century expressed Christian ideals most perfectly, and he used that as inspiration for his work at the Church of St. George.

Cram's interest in the Gothic began in his youth in the early 1880s, while serving a five-year apprenticeship at the Boston architectural firm of Rotch and Tilden. At the time, Cram lived on Beacon Hill's Pinckney Street, which was then a bohemian enclave of artists, writers, and aesthetes. One of his immediate neighbors was the English architect Henry Vaughan, whose chapels of the 1880s at St. Paul's School in New Hampshire and the Groton School in Massachusetts created the vogue for English Gothic Revival churches on American boarding school campuses. Vaughan became a mentor to young Cram, and undoubtedly fostered Cram's own taste for Gothic architecture.[59]

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56 Ibid., p. 155.

57 Withey, p. 145.

58 Doll, *Heart of the Hilltop*, pp. 15-16.

59 Tucci, pp. 45-49.

Cram served out his apprenticeship but, unhappy with his experience, he quit architecture and became an art critic. (He continued to write and lecture about both art and architecture for the rest of his life.) In 1886 and again in 1887, Cram took extensive tours abroad, where he had two life-altering epiphanies. Favorably impressed by the great medieval Catholic churches of Europe, as well as by contemporary Gothic Revival works in England designed by George Bodley (Henry Vaughan's own mentor) and others, Cram rediscovered his enthusiasm for architecture as a career. Equally significantly, while in Italy Cram found himself drawn to the Oxford Movement of the Episcopalian faith, and he decided to convert. These professional and religious interests entwined to create a passion for ecclesiastical building design that persisted throughout Cram's life, and eventually brought him to international prominence as an architect. [60]

Returning from Europe to Boston in 1889, Cram started his own architectural practice with partner Charles Francis Wentworth. The business flourished, and in 1892 Cram and Wentworth took on a third partner, Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, changing the firm name to Cram, Wentworth and Goodhue. (Cram and Goodhue had met through a mutual acquaintance in Boston's bohemian circles, Daniel Berkeley Updike, who knew John Nicholas Brown Sr. through his brother Harold Brown, and thus also gave Cram his introduction to Rhode Island's prominent Brown family.[61] Updike went on to become a celebrated typographer; much later, in 1928, he printed the program for the consecration ceremonies for the Church of St. George.[62]) After Charles Wentworth died in 1897, the surviving partners took on a new colleague, Frank Ferguson, and the firm name changed yet again to Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson. Bertram Goodhue left the firm in 1902, but Cram & Ferguson endured until Cram's death in 1942. The firm of Cram and Ferguson designed educational, public, and religious buildings, including at least five school chapels and eighteen major churches all over the United States during their 40 year partnership, an accomplishment that indeed made the firm world famous. Among their most notable works, in addition to the Church of St. George's at St. George's School, were school chapels at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point (1908) and Princeton University (1929); the Church of All Saints in Peterboro, N.H., and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York.

In the December 1922 issue of the St. George's School *Alumni Bulletin*, Ralph Adams Cram

60 Tucci., p. 79.

61 Ibid., p. 287-288.

62 Doll, *Heart of the Hilltop*, p. ix.

wrote an extensive description of the proposed new chapel. In his introduction to this essay, Cram observed: "It is the express desire of the donor that the Chapel as a work of art should be as perfect as possible, contributing by its beauty to the strength and depth of the religious life at Saint George's, and while the responsibility of the architects is great, it is not too heavy if their efforts are supported and vitalized by the interest and enthusiasm of the masters, pupils, and alumni of the School." [63]

Joseph Coletti, Sculptor

Joseph Arthur Coletti (1898-1973), born in Italy, emigrated with his family to the U.S. in 1901. They settled in Quincy, Mass., where his father worked in the granite quarries as a stone polisher; thus, at a very young age, Joseph began to learn about the properties and treatments of stone. He enrolled in the Quincy Art School at nine, and later studied at the Massachusetts Art School; in 1914, he apprenticed at the studio of the sculptor John Evans. During his time with Evans, Coletti earned the notice of the painter John Singer Sargent, who was preparing his murals for the Boston Public Library and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. In 1916-1917, Sargent engaged the teenaged Coletti to execute the sculptured ceilings in the library's great hall; and a couple of years later, in 1919-1921, the reliefs in the museum's rotunda. "Both of these works hold an important place in the history of American mural decoration."[64]

Sargent also encouraged Coletti to continue his academic studies at Harvard University, where Coletti enrolled in 1919. It was at Harvard that Coletti gained a comprehensive education both in studio art and art history. It was also at Harvard that Coletti met fellow student John Nicholas Brown, Jr. in a class on medieval sculpture taught by Professor A. Kingsley Porter. (Coincidentally, Coletti had already been introduced to the architect Ralph Adams Cram; in 1916, Cram had commissioned Coletti to sculpt the model for an elaborate Celtic cross granite funerary monument in Albany, N.Y.[65]) After graduating from Harvard in 1923, Coletti won two prestigious fellowships to continue his studies abroad. He traveled in Europe for a few months in the summer of 1923, and in 1924 he moved to Rome, where he spent eighteen months at the American Academy.

In 1924, before Coletti went to Rome, John Nicholas Brown, Jr. commissioned him to create

63 *Alumni Bulletin*, December 1922, p. 7.

64 Coletti, p. viii.

65 Ibid., p. 135: "Horrigan Cross."

approximately 50 stone sculptures for the new chapel at St. George's School. Coletti began work on the project while still in Rome, returned to Boston in 1926, and finished in 1930. Coletti's productivity during this time was truly remarkable, especially considering that he created a fully detailed model of every single piece for final approval by Brown and Cram, before the actual carving began. Works in stone include bosses, gargoyles, portrait heads, waterspouts, column capitals, corbels, panels, and statuary. Standing out amidst all this stone is the magnificently carved teak Donor's Door.

The common interests and artistic sensibilities shared by Coletti, Brown, and Cram undoubtedly enhanced their collaboration on this project, especially in choosing the iconography of the new chapel: "a perfect accord and unity of ideals between the sculptor, the architect, and the donor."[66] Creative inspiration came not only from typical Christian and medieval Gothic themes but also from such diverse sources as the legend of St. George, the campus's seaside setting and Rhode Island's maritime history, contemporary life in the late 1920s, and St. George's school itself. Portrait heads of all the major figures involved in constructing the new chapel keep watch over the entire campus from their perches on the turret tower. Other sculptures are decidedly playful, such as a statue of Don Quixote on the newel post at the top of the turret stairway ("…a symbol of idealistic but impractical vision" [67]); a school of dolphins on a waterspout; bosses depicting a football player, a baseball player, and a crossword puzzle. This combination of spirituality, real life, and whimsicality makes the sculpture at St. George's unique among chapels at other private Episcopal boarding schools.

Some of Coletti's work for St. George's was exhibited in a one-man show at Harvard's Fogg Museum in 1928. A glowing review written by the eminent Harvard art historian Chandler R. Post, published in the *Boston Evening Transcript,* praised Coletti for achieving the "…maximum of possible originality by an iconographical inventiveness that is quite in the mediaeval spirit and yet individual in conception." [68] Post characterized Coletti's statue of St. George with the slain dragon at his feet (executed in limestone over the main entrance to the chapel, copied in bronze for the Fogg exhibit) as "the most noble creation of the first three decades in American sculpture of this century," and compared it favorably to a statue of St. George by the great Renaissance sculptor Donatello: high praise indeed for an emerging

66 Coletti, p. 136.

67 Ibid., p. xiii.

68 Doll, *Heart of the Hilltop*, p. 32.

artist.[69] Thirty years later, in 1958, the Italian government acquired Coletti's bronze of St. George for the permanent collection of the Pitti Palace in Florence: a first for an American sculptor in any Italian museum at that time. In 1961 he was awarded an Order of Merit by the President of Italy.

The chapel at St. George's School gave Coletti a national (and later international) reputation as a sculptor, jump-starting an illustrious career that lasted for 45 years, until his death in 1973. Working with equal facility in stone, bronze, and wood, he executed both secular commissions – portrait statuary, abstract nudes, medals, public art, memorials and monuments, fountains – and religious ones. Much of Coletti's secular work was done for public and private clients in Massachusetts, but his best known religious works are at the chapel at St. George's School in Rhode Island, and at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Baltimore. (Historian Samuel Eliot Morison, in *The Oxford History of the American People* (1965), cites Coletti's work in Baltimore, done in 1958-1959, as among the very few notable pieces of American sculpture of the mid-20th century.[70]) Coletti also participated in numerous invitational exhibitions of contemporary American and international sculpture: at the Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco; the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts; the 1939 World's Fair in New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York; the Philadephia Museum of Art; and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, to name a few. He was published in both American and foreign art journals, including *Art & Archeology*, *Town & Country*, *Contemporary American Sculpture*, *L'Artisan Liturgique: Revue trimestrielle d'art religieux* (Belguim), *Die Christliche Junst* (Germany), *American Art Today* and *American Artist*. His sculptures are found in numerous private and museum collections across the United States, and also in the Museum of Treasures in Cracow, Poland, the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, and the Vatican Library in Rome.

69 Coletti, p. xiv and xix-xx.

70 Ibid., p. 154.

Samuel Yellin, Blacksmith

Wrought iron was used for hardware (strap hinges, latches, knockers) and other decoration on twelve doors throughout the chapel, as well as for window grilles, chandeliers in the statio and the crypt, and a lectern in the pulpit. John Nicholas Brown, Jr. purchased a few of these elements specifically for St. George's: for example, the dragon knocker on the Donor's Door is Spanish, 15th century, while the window grilles in the sanctuary door and in the crypt stairway are also Spanish antiques. All new ironwork created for the chapel, however, was the work of Samuel Alexander Yellin of Philadelphia.

Born and raised in Poland, Yellin (1885-1940) trained as a blacksmith and received his master's certificate in 1902, at the age of 17. He came to America in 1906, enrolled at the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Art, and soon was appointed an instructor there, teaching a course in wrought iron until 1919. He started his own business in Philadelphia in 1922. By the time the St. George's project came along, Ralph Adams Cram had already used Yellin on several other church projects; but again, John Nicholas Brown Jr. made the final decision to hire him. Yellin had a reputation for high quality design, excellent craftsmanship, and ensuring a harmonious relationship between the ironwork and other architectural elements in a given project (qualities that likely endeared him to the notoriously detail-oriented JNB Jr.). Yellin spent two years working on the St. George's School chapel.

The Samuel Yellin Metalworkers Co. prospered, and eventually employed some 300 people. When Yellin died suddenly in 1940, at age 55, he was eulogized as follows: "It is doubtful if America has ever had an artist whose name more completely identifies himself with a particular type of creative work than the name of Samuel Yellin, the metalworker…Merely the words "wrought iron" are sufficient to call up the name of Yellin. No man in America came near him in scale of work and robustness of design."[71]

[End Section 8.]

71 Doll, *Heart of the Hilltop*, p. 38.